

**Bonni:** [00:00:00] Today on episode number 212 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast I answer listener questions along with some friends.

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**Bonni:** [00:00:18] Hello and welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be more present for our students.

**Bonni:** [00:00:46] There's a podcast that I love listening to called Reply All and one of the fun things that they do once a year is celebrate what they call Email debt forgiveness day. How does it work? And I'm quoting from the website [emaildebtforgiveness.me](http://emaildebtforgiveness.me).

**Bonni:** [00:01:03] "If there's an e-mail response you've wanted to send, but have been too anxious to send, you can send it on April 30th without any apologies or explanations for all the time that has lapsed. It doesn't matter how long it's been, just include the link to this explainer- the one you're reading right now so that your recipient knows what's going on. Together we can all make our inboxes less stressful." And that is a quote from Alex Goldman, who is one of the hosts of Reply All.

**Bonni:** [00:01:34] Today I'm doing a variation on Email debt forgiveness day. Today is my Q&A episode debt forgiveness day. I have had questions that come in periodically from listeners and I really enjoy hearing from you. Sometimes I'm not able to get to your questions though. And some of them, this time, they're just so rich and deep. And I know that some of them are light hearted questions, but some of them are just deep, painful things that are struggles that you have with your teaching.

[00:02:01] So I'm going to declare Episode 212 as Q&A debt forgiveness day and I'm going to tackle... I'm going to try to tackle all of them. I may not go into as much depth. I may just even open up the conversation and invite some of you to chime in, which you can do in the comments section at [teachinginhighered.com/212](http://teachinginhighered.com/212). Or you are welcome to just talk on Twitter or on—we've got a Teaching in Higher Ed Slack channel, or wherever you might like to engage further on these questions. But I just want to pose them and get some answers. And I will not be the only one answering them, I did ask some members of the Teaching in Higher Ed community if they would chime in as well; so I've got some answers coming in from others too.

**Bonni:** [00:02:43] Question #1: Assessing reflective essays. This person is wondering if I would consider doing an episode - I'm not doing a whole episode, although I do have some episodes coming up that are very much related to your question that I'm excited for you to hear. But on this one asking about assessing reflective essays. It's a topic that generates a lot of debate in terms of how to grade what is often quite a personal piece by students in an effective and objective manner.

**Bonni:** [00:03:11] And I wanted to note that since you wrote this question, which of course was many many moons ago, I did air an episode with a Asao Inoue and one of the things that he talks about is grading more in terms of labor and that that can reduce some of the inequities that are in our classroom spaces. And I would say particularly with reflective essays, that might be a paradigm to introduce into your thinking. If we are truly trying to have our students experience the benefits of reflective learning, it can be really challenging and harmful, I would even go so far as to say, to grade reflection, to grade one's thoughts on what they're getting out of something. It's hard though because part of it is we've created this whole set of systems and norms and culture that says that we're gonna grade things and there's this transactional kinds of relationships that happen.

**Bonni:** [00:04:16] I would suggest that you first of all go back and listen to that episode with him if you didn't already. I will link to it in the show notes. And then I also have already got a commitment from Jesse Stommel who - him among many others do a lot of work around a movement called ungrading. And I'll link to something if I can find it but also just know that you will be hearing some upcoming episodes on ungrading as well that might challenge all of us in terms of thinking about grading and how that fits in with our teaching philosophy and our beliefs about students.

**Bonni:** [00:04:49] And Isabeau Iqbal, who we're going to hear from later in the episode, she said she didn't have enough to record a response but she suggested that maybe you might think about some kind of self assessment might be helpful. Although she also then thought it might also irritate the student who would think "What the heck! First I have to reflect and now I have to self assess?" But if they have a rubric and can comment on their own work, it would possibly help this challenging grading situation.

**Bonni:** [00:05:17] She also posted a link to some resources from DePaul University that might be helpful in terms of assessing reflection as well so I'll post that link in the show notes as well.

**Bonni:** [00:05:29] Question #2: Delegation. "I'm quite a beginner in faculty and wondering how to delegate well. I have student assistants of varying levels and time budget and soon part time or full time employees who will be assisting my teaching and my research. I've noticed that delegation here is different to how it was an industry. I'd love to hear from someone further down the track on how this can work."

**Bonni:** [00:05:53] I'll say, in my experience, delegation is just tough no matter what industry you're in or no matter who you are attempting to delegate to. One of the complexities with delegating to students, however, is that we know that they will eventually move on to other things and that's the whole goal, of course is the development process and then they leave.

**Bonni:** [00:06:15] So, in that sense we can think about that in terms of our employees too, growing, developing them and they progress within the organization. So that's also common in workplaces as well. A couple of thoughts came to mind as I read your message that have worked for me in terms of delegating within an academic context.

**Bonni:** [00:06:34] There is a podcast and website and a whole community called Asian Efficiency and they did a really nice episode on delegation back in February that I'll link to. And I thought that they called this defining done. I thought I remember them saying define done but I couldn't find it when I searched for it. So the words that they use in the episode or at least in their show notes are "acceptance criteria." This is so vital. I don't care what context you're in but just to know what done is going to look like.

**Bonni:** [00:07:04] And then Don McAllister is a guest who was recently on a Mac Power Users show and he really stresses the importance of documenting

processes and what are known as a workflows. They are very similar a process you know step one click here or make a photocopy of this, or scan this or whatever. Step 2, step 3. And then workflows are often associated with technological means for making these things more efficient. So he recommended a website called Podio for workflows. That might be worth looking at. Often I tend to do it just using Dropbox paper. That's a nice word processing type tool that I like because it allows for easily creating little checkboxes and that kind of thing. You can look at Asana which is more of a group based project manager that has a pretty good free plan and as you grow then you can look into the paid plan. And then Google apps of course.

**Bonni:** [00:08:05] So my recommendation there would be to be working in the cloud which can be very helpful because students are going to be all over the place sometimes or on their phones, sometimes they're on a computer or tablet and everybody's in different places but we can all be on the same page- in this case the virtual page if we work in the cloud.

**Bonni:** [00:08:23] Question #3: Quizlet Live. There's a faculty member who teaches in biology at Cleveland State University in Cleveland, Ohio. This person's writing to inquire if I might be able to provide or at least point to more information on the use of flashcard apps to facilitate learning in introductory science courses. And they teach two semester Intro to Bio sequence for biology majors about 500 students in each of the fall and spring semesters. So we're talking about large class sizes. And they go on to talk about a number of different techniques that they've tried at their institution: Supplemental Instruction, Structured Learning Assistance Clickers and they forgot what else. And that it's hard for them, they feel challenged because sometimes it's helpful for the good students that are already motivated to make use of these extra tools but sometimes is resented by or it just turns out to not be effective for students who really need the most help.

**Bonni:** [00:09:24] And this individual talked about reading a post that I wrote called Engaging Students Using Quizlet Live. Quizlet is a flashcards app and this person's been playing with that app as well and wanted to know if I had any other resources for this one. And I still feel like I have a lot more I can explore in terms of flashcards. But just the more that I've learned about retrieval practice and just the efficacy of it, the more that I think these tools are becoming increasingly important to us- particularly those who teach in STEM fields but I don't teach in STEM and I still find them to be helpful as well. So I don't think we can leave other disciplines out as well.

**Bonni:** [00:10:05] So a couple of things I would encourage you to before focusing on the tool, get a sense of the evidence based practice, in this case retrieval practice. So there's a wonderful website called [retrievalpractice.org](http://retrievalpractice.org) that has the science and research behind it and can give you a bit more context around the theory, the practice, and then we can add the tool.

**Bonni:** [00:10:31] I do feel like Quizlet is one of the excellent flashcard sites that I have seen because it's both really good at the basics- you've got flashcard, you've got a term on one side, you've got a definition on the side. Of course you can design and build flashcards that have other formats but just the very basics for getting started. But it has lots of than extras. So now they recently had something where you can have an annotated diagram, or you can record your voice if that's helpful. I mean there's all kinds of sort of extras. You can build a class and then invite people to that class and then they can add their own flashcards to the class.

**Bonni:** [00:11:10] But as you alluded to, it's really critical because our students need to understand why we're asking them to do this and that just has to be something that is regularly talked about in a very transparent way or it doesn't really help. And I recently had a chance to attend a webinar from AAC&U and I'll put a link to my reflections on the webinar which then also links to their resources and tools. But one of the people who was on there was Jose Bowen and he really just stressed again the importance of seeming like were over-communicating just about why we're doing things to help students eventually become more able to do these things for themselves intrinsically and then to carry it over to other classes as well. And I thought that was just a great reminder. So I do still feel like Quizlet is a great tool. I think it's one that is worth looking into.

**Bonni:** [00:12:06] And for some classes, though yours might be too large, but for some classes, that Quizlet Live game I still feel like is just a great hoot. They're are always laughing. And I have a number of students who say they really felt like their learning came alive when they did that because it was a way to become connected with other students. In fact, Sierra Smith talked about that on episode number 199. Sierra is a former student of mine and she described - I didn't even realize until she said it. She really described how it just allowed her to connect with other people in class and a very authentic way and that carried outside of that class onto other classes and just made connections in an authentic and informal way so that was really fun to hear as well.

**Bonni:** [00:12:50] Question #4: Discussion board metrics. This person wrote in and said "we use Moodle 3.0 and I'm having a difficult time teasing out discussion board metrics. Such as words per post, reading level, and even time of responses without manually clicking on each response." And they mention "I teach classes of 50 plus. Is there a discussion forum app out there that does this outside of Moodle? I used Slack in the summer session but while I think it probably does increase the quality of the forums, it's not easy to obtain the metrics, I don't think at least."

**Bonni:** [00:13:25] I was fortunate enough that Maha Bali was able to call in and leave a message. I use a tool called SpeakPipe where people can leave voicemails for the show and it cuts people off at 90 seconds because I don't do the paid plan, this where you get what you pay for I suppose. But she wanted to just say in advance that she was truncated in her ability to answer as much as she would want to and just we both want to be sensitive to there really is this tension of you want there to be... This is me now speaking, I'm not going to speak for Maha, I will let her speak for herself. But you want there to be some accountability because there's just this healthy thing that we don't want there to be absolutely no force that is helping to create this important dialogue that we feel like should be a part of our class. And yet sometimes the overemphasis on metrics gets us in trouble.

**Bonni:** [00:14:23] I'll give a classic example. I took a couple of workshop classes from a very well known institution that provides professional development around online learning to many people around the world. And I was just so frustrated because these were topics that I was very motivated to learn more about. I have intrinsic motivation - the whole reason I advocated to apply to be able to take the workshops was because I care about the topic. And then it's "write a post that has this, this, and this and then reply to at least three other people" and then I just shut down with the "reply to 3 other people." What if there was one person that I really had a lot to say that really their answer resonated with me but I didn't have anything to say to two other people? And I'm taking this class as a part of my professional development, there's no grade. But of course there's a certificate. And so then I have to- anyway so I just wanted to mention there's a lot of tension around when we try to measure things. Oftentimes we don't get the aims that we were hoping for, were hoping for rich, vibrant, meaningful discussion around the topics that we care so much about. And then by measuring them, we lose that. We want accountability, but what we get is apathy.

**Bonni:** [00:15:41] And so I wanted to share Maha's answer with you and then also just know that she had so much more to say and I just wanted you to know that both of us really just hope that you'll take the opportunity to kind of reflect a little bit on how metrics may not be what you're aiming for.

**Maha:** [00:15:59] Hi this Maha Bali from the American University in Cairo, Egypt. I'm someone who isn't a big fan of metrics. I'm trying to figure out why you would want to use metrics such as number of words and things like that. I think the number of posts, the number of words, that kind of thing don't really tell you anything about the quality of the discussion. I understand that the person asking this has over 50 students. I teach only about 20 or 30 at a time. And so I realize that this might be more difficult to look at the actual quality of every single post. But I don't think that counting them in the way is going to help you figure out the quality of them either.

**Maha:** [00:16:40] So if I care about the quality of interaction between students, I want to actually look at what they are saying. They could be writing a lot of words but not really saying much. Or they could be writing a lot of words that sound like an essay and not part of a discussion. So I care more about what they're doing. If you're worried mostly about grading, I still don't think that counting the metrics is going to help you with the grading either. I think you could assign possibly student facilitators to give each other peer feedback on how well the posts are going. Or you could ask students themselves to grade themselves on the quality of their discussion according to rubrics that you give them or that you develop with them, as in what counts as a good quality discussion versus what is not a good quality discussion.

**Bonni:** [00:17:29] Thank you Maha for calling in and sharing that information. And also just your perspective on how we sometimes can pursue metrics and lose some of what we're hoping to have as teachers.

**Bonni:** [00:17:43] The next question, #5 I don't have an answer for. I did want to throw it out to those of you listening, if you have any information about tuition centres for math classes. This individual wrote in, she teaches in Canada and said that many of her students have access to these tuition centers and she is perceiving this disparity between the haves and the have nots. This inequity between people that can afford to get the extra support for her classes and other other classes at her institution versus those who cannot. And I just mentioned that while I don't know about this specific issue, I am pleased to see many tutoring centers, many learning centers really starting to have such great vision for serving some of our students that are more at risk, our underserved

students and that also your question reminded me of episode 207 with Wendy Purcell. And if you haven't listened to that one yet, I'd encourage you to do so.

**Bonni:** [00:18:46] And anyone listening that wants to provide your perspective on how these tuition centers are affecting the higher ed classroom, feel free to make comment at [teachinginhighered.com/212](http://teachinginhighered.com/212).

**Bonni:** [00:19:01] The next question is probably the most challenging question that came in, a really difficult issue to face in the classroom and I wasn't sure if this person wanted to use her name so I will I'll leave it out.

**Bonni:** [00:19:17] "I'm an avid (silent) listener of the podcast. As a junior scholar, you have helped me immensely and with many issues I face in the classroom every day. That's why I'm reaching out to you for help. I currently teach journalism and at our campus we're going through a reckoning when it comes to sexual assault. As we move forward with having important and hard conversations, I'm having a hard time finding resources on how to channel this energy in productive ways in the classroom. How do we talk about having protected a pedophile on campus? How do we reconcile our love for our sports teams with the allegations that our heroes may have been part of a widespread problem of violence and abuse against women? We're experiencing collective trauma and my students are particularly affected as they are both the reporters" remember she teaches journalism "and the subjects of these news stories. Many of those covering abuse may have been victims themselves. We are hurting as some of our beloved colleagues are also found to be implicated in these awful stories. So how can we be there for our students? Do you have an episode or resources that could guide faculty members during this period?"

**Bonni:** [00:20:31] And I thought someone wonderful to answer this question would be my friend and colleague, Sandie Morgan. She is the director for the Global Center for Women and Justice where I teach at Vanguard University of Southern California and she has some guidance for you.

**Sandie:** [00:20:48] Thank you for inviting me to respond to this question about sexual assault on our campuses Bonni. It's a really important topic and I have three recommendations. The first is how can we respond immediately when there is an uproar? The second is creating something everyone can do that contributes to prevention. And the third is how do we frame ongoing conversations?



**Sandie:** [00:21:16] So let me start with number one, our classroom response to sexual assault is already programmed in our policy and by federal law. So Title 9 training is required. Most universities do that online, however. And in my own experience with my students, there is a lack of comprehension after they finish getting the answers. So I would recommend having more dialogue about that. Secondly looking at how we own the discussion, especially when it comes to accountability. That's the immediate response.

**Sandie:** [00:22:03] The second aspect of this is start asking the question in your classroom "how can we be doing this better?" A great tool is bystander prevention. It's a promising approach to sexual violence prevention and it encourages the community to take ownership of sexual violence as a problem and speak up when they witness a potentially dangerous situation or sexist language. Other benefits of this approach include reducing victim blaming and it includes everyone, it gets men involved, not just women. And it's an opportunity to foster social change. And we'll put a link to some samples of that.

**Sandie:** [00:22:48] The third ongoing conversation aspect- I used a tool this last semester in my classroom from Fortune Magazine, Claire Zillman and her article on #MeToo to Now What? 7 Actions That Could Actually Help Stop Sexual Harassment. My two favorites for the men- how will I change? Starting that hash tag. My favorite post for the hashtag #HowIWillChange says "it means sacrificing some of my own social capital so that male centric spaces in which I am safe are also safe for women." That resulted in some great classroom discussion and internalizing how we can be part of reframing conversations on our campus.

**Sandie:** [00:23:45] The other highlight from these seven voices, and you should read all of them, was from Elizabeth Owens Bille and she says "it begins with civility and disrespect that progresses to sexual harassment." So the conversation has to start before we get to sexual assault sexual abuse and go back to study sexual harassment and just learn some new ways of addressing civility and respect. Thanks so much for inviting me to join the Q&A show today Bonni.

**Bonni:** [00:24:24] Sandie thank you for joining me in this conversation and I know what a busy week you've been having, in fact, you just got back from a worldwide trip doing the important work that you do. And I know as you say you're over jetlag now but still have a little bit of a cold. So thank you so much to us for setting aside part of your day to answer this person's question because it was asked a long time ago but I suspect probably there's not clarity around at all and I just hope that your wisdom just oozes out to her and to others who have similar questions as well.

**Bonni:** [00:24:58] The next question is around unmotivated students. "I'm looking for insights into students who are unmotivated and even hostile. These are students who are required to take a course for their degree, but they don't agree with the mandate. For example, I teach a general biochemistry course at the University of Minnesota. It's a fairly deep dive into the subject. Two thirds of the class are in majors where the level is needed. But a third are majoring in dental hygiene. I agree with them that this is a lot more than they need and I've actually lobbied that the program substitute another course that I teach. The level of this alternative course and it's clinical relevance would be perfect for them, but my recommendation has been vetoed by their program director without much explanation. So they're frustrated. And I agree with them but I can't water down the content because two thirds of the need the content as it is. I've squeezed in as many clinical examples as I can but I have a massive amount of material to cover since I have to start with a review of general chemistry. I'm enjoying your podcast but they seem to be aimed at providing a better experience for already motivated students. I get the full range in many of the courses that I've taught in my 32 years of experience and I feel that the unmotivated students need an education as well."

**Bonni:** [00:26:16] I wanted to bring someone into the conversation who I have such a high regard for who teaches a subject not identical to yours, but similar to yours, and that is math. Robert Talbert has been such a treasure for me getting to know and certainly comes across his share of unmotivated students who are having a hard time seeing the relevance of his courses as well. So I'm going to pass it over to Robert now to give you some of his thoughts.

**Robert:** [00:26:41] So motivation is hard work. And in my view, maybe it's the hardest work we are responsible for as instructors. But at least it is something we can work on. So here are three things that you might try that will boost the motivation levels of your students, especially those students who come in with very low levels of motivation. So first of all, think about ways to give students the ability to make choices in your course that give them some control over what you're experiencing. The research on self determination confirms our common sense that says that when we have control and agency over the situations we're in, we're more motivated to persist and enjoy those situations than when we have no choice.

**Robert:** [00:27:15] So try to find places in your course where you can build in student choice that really makes a difference. For example, on a timed test, instead of giving a single problem to work out or a writing prompt to respond to,

you might try giving three items that are equally difficult and assess the same learning objective. But they're different in their focus and the way they're phrased. And then ask students is to pick one of those, pick their favorite one to respond to. Or on a bigger level, instead of coming to class with a single lesson plan, you can give students a choice and just ask them how they'd like to spend their class time that day. And maybe you end up with some students working in groups on problems and other groups of students getting direct instruction. But it gives them choice as to how the classroom is being used. On an even bigger scale, you can actually build choice into your grading scheme. For example, one thing I tried in the past is letting students adjust the percentages that various items count toward a grade within certain reason. Or if you're like me today and use specifications grading, you can allow students to choose the evidence they're going to present to you that shows they are satisfied with the course specifications.

**Robert:** [00:28:16] So you can't always give students free reign in a class, but you can take small steps to hand the reins back over to them whenever it does make sense. A second thing you might try doing is something simple which is just making connections between the subject matter and student's interests. Or better yet, have students make those connections. Students of course don't come to class as a blank slate, they are going to bring backstories and interests that got them where they are today. So make sure to emphasize the connections between the course material and those interests.

**Robert:** [00:28:45] Also connect course concepts to each other so students don't feel like they're learning just a firehose spring of facts. Students will be more motivated when they see how the pieces fit and see the big picture. And as a side effect, we know that making connections between concepts will help students store those concepts more efficiently in the long term memory which can be more motivating for students because they are learning better.

**Robert:** [00:29:07] Now you can draw those connections yourself or students can do them themselves. For example, you can get them mind mapping exercises or simple free write exercises, one minute paper types of things where you just ask students to think about how the day's material connects to something they're interested in or something they learned last week. I used ask my calculus students at the end of every class "how has today's material helped solve the problem of world hunger?" And I got some really weird answers, but they really loved this exercise and they became pretty inspiring, some of the things they would come up with.

**Robert:** [00:29:37] A third and final thing we can do to help students be more motivated is simply being enthusiastic about the subject ourselves. So both enthusiasm and the lack of enthusiasm are contagious. When you're enthusiastic about mature teaching, it's very hard for students to be bored and vice versa. If you show no interest in the stuff you are teaching, students would never be motivated no matter how much you do. Being enthusiastic doesn't mean giving a song and dance routine in class every day because I'm an introvert and Lord knows I would hate doing that and I cannot do such a thing every single day in class.

**Robert:** [00:30:07] But there are little things we can do that are honest and realistic that inject ourselves and our stories and our enthusiasms about material in our presentation about stuff that we're teaching. For example, saying "oh this is one of my favorite topics in the class," or "this is a topic that is really hotly debated today," or "when I was in school and learning this subject that were doing today made a really big impact on me." So little things like that just connect ourselves to the material and show that we are interested in it too.

**Robert:** [00:30:34] So find ways to insert yourself and your enthusiasm for that subject and give that gift to your students. And even if you have to work at finding that enthusiasm- which I admit, I still have to do sometimes with certain subjects. Working towards that and finding why you yourself are interested in it, turning it around and showing students really really pays off. So bottom line here is that we actually can create motivation in the students we have. We don't have to just wish we had more motivated students. And we can do this through a few simple no cost measures that really make a difference. So thanks and good luck.

**Bonni:** [00:31:08] A similar question is the eighth question I received around course evaluations. "I appreciated the episode on course evaluations. It means a lot that someone as successful as you still care so much about every student. Someday though I'd love to hear from an instructor who started with a mediocre course evaluations and got better. I know it comes from a good place, but it's easier for someone who's won lots of teaching awards to say 'I don't care about teaching awards' than someone who strives mightily to get above average scores year after year. I know at some institutions there are other forms of evaluation for teaching, but when students scores are the only one it's hard to not take them seriously. So much of interpreting student evaluations feels to me like storytelling. You construct a narrative about what produced certain comments and what they imply about the course and the learning experience. For me at least, it basically is a guess whether the narrative is correct and quite

hard to test. Yet when people talk about reading the evals and course feedback mechanisms, it's all about discrete, fixable problems like 'this assignment description in the syllabus was confusing'. This episode had some helpful ideas but I still find it incredibly challenging to go from the evils to actionable steps for improving my teaching."

**Bonni:** [00:32:25] And I am so thankful for this message. I love the rawness of it. I love that you want it to be concrete and yet we know that it's often not. And I reached out to other members in the community and got an answer from Isabeau. Isabeau Has been on the podcast in the past. I'll post a link to the episode when she was on. She's just such a wealth of information about teaching and learning. I'm so grateful for her ongoing contributions to the podcast and so here is a message from Isabeau with some thoughts for you.

**Isabeau:** [00:32:59] My advice to you is to have an educational developer from your teaching and learning center, if you have one. Read the course evaluations as well. And then the two of you could compare what messages you glean from the students comments and together you could determine some actions steps. That's one suggestion.

**Isabeau:** [00:33:25] The other is that you could collect additional data through midcourse evaluations or small group instructional feedback. And that will allow you to check in with the students about the results and that data and give you someone to bounce your own interpretations off of. And they could correct anything that you may have construed differently than they intended to.

**Bonni:** [00:33:54] Thank you Isabeau for participating in giving us some resources. There are going to be some links as well to the resources we've been discussing. I was chuckling when I heard your answer Isabeau, my first thought is never to go to someone else on my campus. We have a very newly instituted Institute of Faculty Development. I am a part of that and so I am so used to us just not having that kind of resource on our campus that I tend to think of it as finding other sources. But if you've got that on your campus, that's the place to go. Trusted relationships with others who have seen lots of different evaluations and are educated about some of the lack of concrete steps that you described. And also just a safe place to have these kinds of conversations and let your guard down a little bit. So thank you so much for that recommendation and I again thanks for the email.

**Bonni:** [00:34:57] Question #9: The professor as administrator. They were suggesting a potential episode on this, but I thought I'd at least start the

conversation now and I'm reading from their message: "There are a couple of ways this plays out in my life. The first is keeping track of student attendance, interaction in class, preparedness etc.. It's a bit like running a small business with over 100 employees many of whom begrudge the work."

**Bonni:** [00:35:18] And I would just point back to the earlier conversation about metrics when it comes to that. But I wanted to hone in on your second part of your question. "The second is the administrative duties on committees. I'm secretary of my faculty. This involves taking and keeping minutes of meetings, planning curricular and course changes, and envisioning the future. It's the second I'm really interested in, I know you teach business and likely have skills in those areas. The majority of my colleagues don't. I certainly don't, being a professor of theology. I'm especially interested in planning software. For example, Trello. It may be that you've talked about this and I've just missed it."

**Bonni:** [00:35:57] This really reminded me that there's been a lot of conversation on Twitter in recent months led particularly by Jesse Stommel that is stressing how we just don't have adequate training for graduate students on how to teach. While we are woefully aware most of us, that we don't have adequate training for professors who are transitioning into administrator roles. And committee work can be one of the early ways in which that can show up. I am a big time geek when it comes to these things. If you've been listening for awhile you probably know that. Right now, there's a great website called The Sweet Setup. And The Sweet Setup does extensive reviews of all these different task managers among many other tools for us.

**Bonni:** [00:36:44] And Things is the app that right now for task managers for individuals that's really winning the day. I'll link to their post about that. And as I talked about before, another good group one is Asana. And so those are a couple ones that I would recommend checking out for project management. I find that since people in academic circles tend to be all over the map as far as how digital they are or analog when it comes to their planning, I just get really, really good with my own personal task management system. Which for my case I use a tool called Omnifocus. And just to let you know, when they analyzed between Things and Omnifocus, they said Things is best for most people, if you really want to trick things out the Omifocus is still raining the day. And they're actually going to come out with a new version of their desktop app, having recently come out with an iOS app that is going to be top notch. So those of you who are on a Mac that really like to trick things out, Omnifocus has some great things going on, but Things is also a great one to look at as well. So I'll post

links to all of those in the show notes and thanks for getting us thinking a little bit about this.

**Bonni:** [00:37:53] Since we're on the topic of the professor as administrator, before I go on to question 10 I wanted to celebrate this episode's sponsor and that is TextExpander and it fits perfectly here because yes, they do provide some financial support for the show, for the podcast editing, for the host. It's wonderful having them, but I used their product long before they ever sponsored the show. And one of the reasons that it's so essential is how it saves me time. And in fact you can change the setting, but I do like to get emails from them that talk about how much time they save me. It's a regular thing where I just have built in to when I'm finding myself repeating typing the same thing over and over again whether it's something as small as my work telephone number that I never remember, or something as large as the template for the show notes for every episode, I can capture that text inside of TextExpander and tell it that every time I type this few letters or numbers or whatever makes the most sense for me and press the space bar, it's going to expand out into a wonderful way of saving me time.

**Bonni:** [00:39:00] So they're called snippets and I might type in ZWK as in work phone and then I press space and there it goes I've got it set up for our P.O. Box, for my work phone, I mentioned the show notes. And I was actually corresponding on the Teaching in Higher Ed Slack channel with someone we were even brainstorming, TextExpander would be a great tool to use for making writing letters of reference more efficient.

**Bonni:** [00:39:33] And sometimes people cringe when I talk about making things more efficient, because we certainly don't want to take away from the humanity of our relationship. So it's saving us time on the non consequential things that don't need the human touch such that we could put that much more into the things that do. So in the case of a letter of recommendation, the date, it knows what the date is and it can be entered by TextExpander automatically for you. Who the letter should be addressed to, you can set up- imagine just the single TextExpander snippet for a letter of reference and it puts in the date automatically then it says Who is this to? Is it to a committee? A person? Who is supposed to be addressed to? They're all going to be addressed to someone or some body of people. That's something that's common. I'm writing this letter to and then you could have it come up why are you writing this letter? Is it to recommend? Is it to recommend for graduate school? Recommend for whatever. I mean it's one of those things that if you spend a little bit of time- and you can start small, just to have it remember your work

phone number. I do it for signatures because I have different signatures that I use in different context. So I use that a lot. You can start small and it's one of those tools that will really grow with you.

**Bonni:** [00:40:47] So I want to mention TextExpander, you can go find out more about their service and get a little bit of a discount by going to [TextExpander.com/podcasts](https://TextExpander.com/podcasts) and I encourage you to do that and that link will also be over in the show notes at [teachinginhighered.com/212](https://teachinginhighered.com/212). So thanks so much to teks expander for sponsoring this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed.

**Bonni:** [00:41:12] Question #10: Group presentations in online live classes. "Hello I'm teaching a live online class in January." Sorry, January has come and went but maybe you'll teach it again next January. "It will be my second time doing this course. Last year, the students gave group presentations covering each chapter of text in 20 minutes. However, it seemed like a very useful project because it was too much information to cover in depth. I liked the idea of group presentations but I'm wondering if any of your past podcasts or blog post cover tips for designing effective assignments of this kind. Thank you."

**Bonni:** [00:41:45] I have struggled with this as well. If you're talking about a live class meaning you're connecting using some kind of a virtual conferencing system. We just tend to zone out, "oh 20 minutes, okay so and so's presenting. Okay Well I can set my watch and maybe sleep or go on my email or whatever" because it's so predictable and rote and lacking of any human excitement or anything like that. It's just too forced, it's too planned, it's bland, it's not engaging, it's not challenging in the best sense of education. And so I think you're right to be asking these questions.

**Bonni:** [00:42:25] I have moved away from these kinds of group presentations in live online classes. I really enjoy the web conferencing tool that is called Zoom. And again it's not about the tool it's about how we use them. What I like about Zoom though is it's helped me better be emblematic of my teaching philosophy is their use of breakout rooms and how easy it is for anyone who is connected on the Zoom classroom to share their screen. And of course you can change the settings because you want to have more control over that but I was always just let it go. And so it's more natural when we're sitting there together to be like "Oh did you see an article about that? Or is there some part of your PowerPoint that was slide 4 that was particularly helpful" and so I'm doing a lot less group presentations or even individual presentations and a lot more using those breakout rooms.



**Bonni:** [00:43:21] So I ask for people to come to the class with a slide deck prepared usually of literally three or four slides nothing verbose nothing that's going to go on and on. But I have them share- even in some cases it's just an info graphic, it's not even a slide. But some of the info graphic tools like Piktochart, you build an info graphic in Piktochart and it actually creates a series of slides for use so you could present a long info graphic in individual slides so that's kind of a mix between an info graphic and a few slides.

**Bonni:** [00:43:54] So they come with that on their computer, ready to go but they share them in smaller breakout rooms. And then when we come back together then the conversation is What were some of the highlights? What were the surprises? What was intriguing? What are you wondering more about? What do you want to celebrate with a larger group? And those conversations have been so much more engaging. And that's something that I suggest. Thank you for your question. I hope the class went well and I'd love an update from you if you have a chance.

**Bonni:** [00:44:24] This is the part in the show where we do recommendations and I am out of time so I'm just going to circle back and say check out Zoom if you've never checked it out before. So that's my recommendation for today.

**Bonni:** [00:44:35] Thanks to all of you for listening. If you have not left a review for the podcast or whatever service it is you use to listen, this is my plea to ask you to do that because it's one of the ways to help people discover their show. It also helps us to have them realize there's a podcast app on their phone and help them subscribe. Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.

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